

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

This introductory chapter presents information regarding the language proficiency of English teachers, specifically primary English language teachers. Moreover, the status of the English subject curriculum for primary education in Indonesia and the need to construct a language proficiency test framework to develop a proficiency test instrument for primary English teachers are presented. The elaboration of CEFR and Kurikulum Merdeka is also put forward as the central part of the discussion. Furthermore, the underlying research questions of the study are put forward to give a brief depiction of the objectives of the study.

This chapter also elaborates on some theoretical and practical significance of the present study. To make the research context more comprehensive, this study also highlights the scope and the limitations framing the assessment construct. Some terms are clarified to support the scope and limitations of the study. Finally, the paper's organization and concluding remarks are presented.

1.1 Background of the Study

The English subject curriculum in Indonesia has undergone changes over the course of time (Damayanti, 2019), including the English subject curriculum for basic education as the focus of this study. The inclusion of the English subject in the 2013 Curriculum (*Kurikulum* 2013) differed between primary school and secondary/high school levels. While it was not mandated as a compulsory subject or considered a local content subject for primary schools, it was incorporated into the curriculum for junior and high school levels. In 2022, the Indonesian government established a national curriculum named *Kurikulum Merdeka*, which incorporates the English subject from primary to high school levels.

The inclusion of the English subject in primary schools demands well-proficient teachers to use the language effectively and efficiently for

communicative and instructional purposes in the classroom (Renandya et al., 2018). As a foreign language in Indonesia (English as a Foreign Language – EFL), English should be taught with utmost proficiency and effectiveness. The level of proficiency in the target language possessed by a language teacher plays a significant role in determining their ability to provide a reliable model of the target language input to their students (Farrell & Richards, 2018).

Numerous studies, however, have shown that the language proficiency levels of primary English language teachers were mixed and low. A study conducted by Sofwan and Habibi (2015) employed the English Proficiency Test (EPT), a standardized assessment similar to the TOEFL, to evaluate the proficiency of primary English language teachers in Jambi. Their study revealed that the average score of primary English language teachers' proficiency level was 363.06, which was lower than the expected outcome and classified as being under the Poor and Fair performance categories. Meanwhile, Lengkanawati (2005) identified the English proficiency and preparedness of EFL teachers in West Java, Indonesia, in relation to the implementation of the 2004 Curriculum. A total of 38 high school teachers took part in a paper-based proficiency test equivalent to the TOEFL. The results indicated that the average score achieved by the teachers was 467, which was lower than the standard average score of 500.

Several local context studies also identified that most English teachers at the primary level are homeroom teachers and have little TEYL knowledge (Apriliana, 2018; Dewi et al., 2020; Meisani et al., 2020; Zein, 2017). Consequently, this issue has contributed to a significant number of Indonesian high school graduates lacking the ability to effectively communicate in English (Damayanti, 2019; Hamied, 2013; Meisani et al., 2020; Renandya et al., 2018; Sikki et al., 2013; Sofwan & Habibi, 2015; Zein, 2017). Therefore, if English teachers at the primary level could not or did not have sufficient proficiency in both teaching the language and utilizing it for instructional and communicative purposes inside the classroom, it would be a challenging task to repair what went wrong.

The issue of low and mixed language proficiency levels among primary English language teachers has been recursively occurring (Meisani et al., 2020; Musthafa, 2010; Musthafa & Hamied 2014). The recurring phenomenon has suggested the imperative development of a standardized language proficiency test specifically designed for primary English language teachers in Indonesia (Renandya et al., 2018).

The development of a tailored language proficiency test instrument for primary English language teachers is anticipated to serve as a means of connecting the gap between language proficiency and the delivery of successful language education (Renandya et al., 2018). The existing language proficiency tests such as TOEFL or IELTS do not adequately measure the necessary language proficiency for communication and particular linguistic abilities necessary for successful classroom instruction (Renandya et al., 2018). It is essential to establish a clear distinction between a language proficiency test that evaluates general English level and a language proficiency test specifically designed for primary English language teachers (Yusuf & Novita, 2020). This is because testing the levels of language proficiency for primary English teachers involves specific requirements that are aligned with accomplishing the goal of learning English at the basic education level.

The present study is part of a bigger research project conducted by a research team from a state university in Indonesia in developing a language proficiency test instrument for primary English language teachers. The test instrument is named *Test for Primary English Language Teachers* (TPELT) and it is accessible through a digital platform. Prior to developing a language proficiency test instrument, a test framework should be constructed. This framework aims to become a blueprint for test developers as a more holistic guide in developing test items suitable for primary English teachers. Therefore, this study focuses on constructing a language proficiency test framework suitable for primary English language teachers in Indonesia.

Constructing a language proficiency test framework suitable for Indonesia should focus on two relevant aspects. These aspects are the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for Languages and *Kurikulum Merdeka*. CEFR is widely recognized as one of the established language proficiency frameworks and it presents scales that are related to measuring language proficiency, one of which is communicative language activities and strategies. Meanwhile, *Kurikulum Merdeka* adapts CEFR as its language proficiency equivalence when students graduate from high schools.

CEFR is extensively employed in the domains of language acquisition, pedagogy, and evaluation. The Council of Europe has developed a standardized approach to delineating language proficiency levels and abilities across many languages, including English (2001; 2018). CEFR establishes a classification system consisting of six levels of proficiency, denoted as A1 (Basic User) to C2 (Proficient User). Each level is distinguished by certain language competencies and communication capacities, which are articulated through Can-Do statements (Council of Europe, 2001; 2018). The incorporation of CEFR into the construction of primary English language teachers' proficiency test framework guarantees conformity with worldwide language standards, facilitates the advancement of communicative objectives within the educational setting, and fosters meaningful evaluations of language proficiency levels.

Kurikulum Merdeka provides a set of principles and objectives for language education, encompassing the teaching of English as a foreign language. The incorporation of *Kurikulum Merdeka* into the proficiency test framework guarantees the appropriateness and customization of the evaluation to meet the needs of Indonesian English teachers. Through the alignment of the test framework with *Kurikulum Merdeka*, the assessment can encompass not only language proficiency but also pedagogical content knowledge, culturally responsive teaching strategies, and the specific language competencies that are essential for primary English teachers in Indonesia.

Based on the identified challenges pertaining to the varying levels of language proficiency among primary English language teachers in Indonesia and the absence of a specific assessment tool for evaluating their language proficiency, the primary objective of this research is to ascertain the ways CEFR and *Kurikulum Merdeka* in constructing a language proficiency test framework for primary English language teachers in Indonesia. Furthermore, to identify the main objective of the research, this study aims to identify the relevant communicative language activities and strategies for the Receptive and Productive skills test framework.

1.2 Research Questions

Constructing an assessment framework was a crucial undertaking in the beginning stages of the bigger research project, aimed at developing a language competence test instrument. The objective of the current study is to develop a framework for assessing the language ability of primary English language instructors in Indonesia. The present study specifically investigated the potential contributions of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) and the *Kurikulum Merdeka* in constructing a language competence assessment framework for the development of the Test for Primary English Language Teachers (TPELT). In addition, both the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) and *Kurikulum Merdeka* integrate communicative tasks as a means of assessing language proficiency. Hence, the present investigation is framed by the subsequent research question:

How can CEFR and *Kurikulum Merdeka* help to construct a language proficiency assessment framework for primary English language teachers?

This research question is explored through two sub-questions:

1. What aspects of CEFR are relevant to constructing a language proficiency test framework for primary English language teachers in Indonesia?
2. What aspects of *Kurikulum Merdeka* are relevant to constructing a language proficiency test framework for primary English language teachers in Indonesia?

1.3 The Objectives of the Study

Capturing from the research questions aforementioned, this study aims to:

1. Investigate the ways CEFR and *Kurikulum Merdeka* in helping to construct a language proficiency test framework for primary English language teachers in Indonesia,
2. Identify the aspects of CEFR that are relevant to construct a language proficiency test framework for primary English language teachers in Indonesia.
3. Identify the aspects of *Kurikulum Merdeka* that are relevant to construct a language proficiency test framework for primary English language teachers in Indonesia.

1.4 Significance of the Study

The primary objective of this project is to make a theoretical contribution towards the advancement of a language proficiency test framework that is both customised and standardised for primary English language teachers. This framework will be designed in accordance with the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for Languages and will align with the learning outcomes specified in *Kurikulum Merdeka* for the English topic. The inclusion of *Kurikulum Merdeka* guarantees that the framework accurately represents the unique environment and demands of English language education in Indonesia, encompassing indigenous values, culture, and practical encounters.

This study aims to offer practical guidance and recommendations for the implementation and utilization of the language proficiency test framework in teacher education programs and professional development activities. The findings of the study offer valuable practical implications for test creators about the successful integration of the framework into current systems, hence facilitating the ongoing enhancement of English language teachers' language proficiency.

The test framework is also anticipated to facilitate the creation of a language proficiency test pattern specifically designed for English teachers in Indonesia. This

study is centered on the preliminary phase of constructing an assessment tool, as a component of a larger undertaking. The research conducted focuses on the creation of a comprehensive language proficiency test framework that draws from the CEFR and the *Kurikulum Merdeka*. This framework aims to improve the overall quality of English language instruction, foster fair assessment practises, and facilitate the professional growth of primary English language teachers.

1.5 Scope and Limitations of the Study

The primary objective of this study is to provide a valuable contribution to the advancement of high-stakes exam creation specifically tailored for English teachers in Indonesia. Additionally, its purpose is to provide as a comprehensive guide for test makers who are tasked with creating future test instruments specifically designed to evaluate the language proficiency of English teachers in Indonesia.

This study focuses on the gathering and examination of data pertaining to the communicative language activities and techniques outlined in the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), as well as the learning outcomes from phases A through C in the *Kurikulum Merdeka*. The test framework that has been designed encompasses six language skills, as outlined in the *Kurikulum Merdeka*. These competencies are Listening, Reading, Viewing, Speaking, Writing, and Presenting. Furthermore, the test framework for assessing proficiency aligns with the levels and descriptors outlined by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), ensuring that it is compatible and comparable to worldwide standards for measuring language skills. The framework is a manifestation of certain circumstances, values, and aims pertaining to the instruction of the English language, which are in accordance with the English subject curriculum in Indonesia.

Although the research endeavors to establish a comprehensive test framework for assessing language proficiency, it admits the presence of inherent limitations. The development of a test construct inside the Speaking skills framework was

specifically designed to assess one-way interaction mode. In addition, it should be noted that the administration of the test instrument is conducted through an online platform. However, it is important to acknowledge that the technology necessary to facilitate a two-way interaction for the speaking component of the test platform is not economically viable or practical.

1.6 Clarification of the Key Terms

It is necessary to provide definitions for the major phrases and ideas that are at the heart of this study since doing so explains how those terms and ideas are utilized in this thesis. This subsection provides further explanation of the two important phrases that are utilized throughout the entire research project.

1) Primary English language teachers

Prior to identifying the term primary English language teachers, it is necessary to understand primary-level education in Indonesia. According to the Law on the National Education System Number 20, the Year 2003, Chapter VI, Article 17, primary-level education takes the form of primary schools, that is, *Sekolah Dasar* (SD) and *Sekolah Menengah Pertama* (SMP). In relation to the present study, the test framework is dedicated to primary English language teachers. Thus, the assessment framework in this study is specifically tailored to primary English language teachers who teach students at the elementary school level.

2) Proficiency test framework for Primary English language teachers

A proficiency test is a type of assessment used to determine an individual's level of proficiency or competency in a specific skill or knowledge area. A language proficiency exam in the context of learning a language assesses a person's ability to use the target language successfully for conversation, comprehension, and expression in real-life circumstances (Brown, 2004; Fulcher & Davidson, 2007; Shohamy, 2014; Weir, 2005). In this study, however, the proficiency test is designed to assess primary English language teachers' language teachers for instructional purposes.

Additionally, the proficiency test framework constructed in this study integrates CEFR and *Kurikulum Merdeka* that specifically address the skills needed by teachers. The integration of *Kurikulum Merdeka* includes the learning objectives and phases for primary school levels.

3) Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for Languages

The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for Languages is a widely employed framework that offers a standardized and comprehensive approach to delineating levels of language proficiency and abilities across a range of languages, including English. The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) aims to foster clarity and uniformity in the domains of language instruction, acquisition, and evaluation within diverse national and educational settings (Council of Europe, 2001).

The application of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) can be utilized to delineate the language proficiency levels and competencies of English teachers in Indonesia, as per their respective profiles. In this study, the developed test framework ranges from A2 to B1 levels. Moreover, the comprehensive descriptors provided by the CEFR in the test framework, encompass not only the domains of Listening, Reading, Speaking, and Writing but also include Viewing and Presenting skills, facilitating a more nuanced comprehension of the language competencies possessed by teachers.

4) *Kurikulum Merdeka*

Kurikulum Merdeka was established as a solution to national education amidst the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak. The curriculum gives flexibility to teachers to create quality education that is aligned with student's needs and learning environments (Kemendikbudristek, 2021). In line with the English subject and the present study, *Kurikulum Merdeka* employs 6 (six) learning outcome phases and adopts the CEFR level as a language proficiency reference. This study focuses on identifying

learning phases in *Kurikulum Merdeka* in developing the test framework and how they are aligned with CEFR.

1.7 Organization of the Paper

This thesis is composed of five chapters with the following details.

An abstract presents a short, concise statement covering the issue raised in this study, the gap addressed in the present research, and the research methodology is elaborated. Furthermore, the brief findings are elaborated alongside the conclusions and recommendations.

Chapter I provides an overview of the research background, objective, and question. The significance, scope, and limitations of the study, clarification of key terms, and the organization of the paper are also presented.

Chapter II outlines a comprehensive review of the literature that underlies a wide-ranging elaboration on the study.

Chapter III provides a detailed explanation of the research methodology, including the elaboration of the research design employed in this research, the research context and source of data, data collection, and data analysis procedure.

Chapter IV exposes the developed framework and its components, explaining the rationale behind each.

Chapter V concludes the thesis with a summary of the main findings, a discussion of the study's limitations, and suggestions for future research and implementation. Additionally, the implications and prospective benefits of implementing the proposed proficiency test framework are discussed.

The references page lists the works cited in the study as the core theoretical framework of the study.

1.8 Concluding Remarks

This chapter has mainly presented the introduction of the research. It covers several parts, such as the background of the study that presents the status of the English subject in the current curriculum of *Kurikulum Merdeka*, several findings concerning the mixed level of proficiency among primary English language teachers in Indonesia, and the need to have a standardized test instrument to assess the language proficiency of English teachers in Indonesia.

The research question and the objective of the study were put forward. The significance of the study that contributes new insights regarding the aims of the study theoretically and practically has been explored. The scope and limitations of the study that specifically shows the central area of the study are elaborated alongside the clarification of the key terms to increase the understanding of each term of this research. Finally, the organization of the paper which shows the arrangement of each part of this research, and concluding remarks which cover each point of this chapter are explicated.